

ILLINOIS EARLY LEARNING COUNCIL
February 25, 2008 - 11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
160 N. LaSalle, Bilandic Building, Room N-505, Chicago

MEETING MINUTES

Members Present: Kristi Adell (for Jo Anderson), Carol Auer, Lori Baas, Barbara Bowman (for Arne Duncan), Jeanna Capito, Tim Carpenter (for Mark Donahue), Martina Casey, George Davis, Vinni Hall, Emily Harris (for Adele Simmons), Ava Harston, Kay Henderson, Eboni Howard (for Samuel Meisels), Christopher Koch, Janet Maruna, Mark McHugh, Harriet Meyer, Janice Moenster, Cynthia Moreno (for Bryan Samuels), Lauri Morrison-Frichtl, Carolyn Newberry Schwartz, Claudia Quigg, Barbara Quinn (by phone), Anthony Raden, Vanessa Rich (for Mary Ellen Caron), Elliot Regenstein, Linda Saterfield, Sarah Slaughter, Luz Maria Solis, Jerry Stermer, Myrtis Sullivan (by phone, for Carol Adams), Sheridan Turner, Mark Valentine, Jaci Vaughn (by phone, for Barry Maram), Kathy Villano, Judith Walker Kendrick, Maria Whelan, Katie Williams (for Kay Willmoth), Josie Yanguas

Absent: Awilda Adorno, Ellen Alberding, Guy Alongi, Ann Alvarez, Martha Arntson, Robert Blade, Representative Elizabeth Coulson, Marilu Galan, Phyllis Glink, Representative Deborah Graham, Senator Don Harmon, Colleen Jones, James Kaplan, Terri Lawrence, Trinita Logue, Maureen Marx, Cordelia Meyer, Carol Ronen, Leo Smith

Plan for the Day

Harriet Meyer called the meeting to order at 11:05. Harriet asked members to introduce themselves and reviewed the day's agenda. Harriet asked that the Council approve minutes from the previous meeting. Maria Whelan moved to adopt the October 22, 2007 Early Learning Council meeting minutes. Josie Yanguas seconded the motion, and it passed by unanimous vote.

Updates and Dialogue

Elliot Regenstein reported that the Early Learning Council received a grant to support the staff work of the Early Learning Council committees. He thanked the Grand Victoria Foundation for their support, and also thanked Learning Point Associates for providing staff for the Special Populations committee, one committee that did not receive support in the other grant. Elliot went on to mention that Head Start reauthorization has occurred, and while it did include language on Early Learning Councils, it did not provide any funding for Councils. We are aligning our membership, however, with the membership requirements in the bill, so that we will be ready to move forward in the future. Elliot added that one of the topics in the law concerns how to house data, and that the co-chairs will be convening a meeting to discuss this issue.

Elliot introduced Kay Henderson, Division Administrator for Early Childhood at the Illinois State Board of Education and Barbara Bowman, Chicago Public Schools, Office of Early Childhood Education, and asked them to provide brief updates on FY08 Early Childhood Block Grant spending. Kay H. and Barbara distributed summaries of their Early Childhood Block Grant spending, including spending for both program and infrastructure components. Kay Henderson stated that her office funded 78 new preschool programs, representing about 3500 new children. She added that ISBE funded center-based infant toddler programs for the first time,

and added more than 100 new families to the Prevention Initiative program this year. She stated that contracts for social emotion consultation and the Preschool for All evaluation are still pending, so the figures she reported are draft amounts and are subject to change. Jan Maruna asked Kay for information on BECCA scholarships; Kay explained that BECCA is a collaboration with the bilingual division to help early childhood providers from Spanish-speaking nations to attain their type 04 certificates.

Elliot pointed out the overwhelming demand for birth to three programs and indicated that early childhood advocates are working in Springfield to change the statute in order to get more flexibility so that resources can be put where they are needed.

George Davis pointed out that he was disappointed to not see Head Start among the list of eligible applicants in the itemized list in the Preschool for All report from ISBE. Kay stated that the list was not exhaustive, and stated that she will add Head Start and Early Head Start to the list in next year's report.

Barbara Bowman stated that CPS primarily expanded services in Latino neighborhoods of Chicago. Judith Walker Kendrick asked her to provide more detail on the funding for new classrooms (\$1.5 million); Barbara stated that this amount was allocated to public schools. She explained that community-based program spending was a part of the 'subcontracting and support staff' line in her report (\$55 million). When asked what portion of that amount supports the community partnership staff at CPS and what part supports programs, Paula Cottone stated that it was probably close to \$3 million. Judith Walker Kendrick pointed out that public schools receive funding for admin costs but that community-based programs do not. Barbara agreed, but stated that her office does provide extra bonuses for administrators who have succeeded in obtaining an Illinois Director Credential to try to address this issue.

Kay Henderson reported that the RFPs for FY09 were currently awaiting ISBE approval and will be posted soon. She stated that, based on recommendations from the Oversight and Coordination committee and the Infants and Toddlers committee, some changes will be made to the RFPs. She commented that the RFPs had to be approved by legal counsel for ISBE. Jan Maruna asked about timelines for preschool and infant and toddler programs RFPs. Kay responded that the applications will be due on different timelines, with the preschool RFP to be posted first.

Kay H. went on to discuss the Preschool for All evaluation. She stated that the language in the contract has been finalized but the contracts are not yet signed. Kay mentioned that she will work with Erikson Institute, the entity awarded the evaluation contract, to adjust the work plan and timeline for the project for the current fiscal year.

Review and discuss committee recommendations

Elliot Regenstein asked the co-chairs of the Oversight and Coordination committee to present the recommendations submitted by that committee. Judie Walker Kendrick and Janice Moenster first discussed the committee recommendation that asked that all allowable budget lines be reimbursable through Preschool for All grants. Judie pointed out that some programs in Chicago were not able to budget for supplies and other materials or program elements that were necessary for Preschool for All. Elliot summed up the recommendation and stated that what was desired in the recommendation is budget flexibility in order to use funding for whatever program element of Preschool for All is necessary for individual programs. Kay Henderson clarified that this recommendation addresses issues in CPS, and that the committee had no budget guidance recommendations for ISBE at this time.

Barbara Bowman responded to the recommendation stating that now programs in CPS receive a standard amount of funding based on children served and staffing patterns. She mentioned that changes may increase some programs' funding and decrease others. Judith Walker Kendrick asked Barbara about costs for school-based programs. Barbara responded that the Preschool for All program costs more in public schools because schools often have higher salary costs because teachers have been in the system for a long time. Judith Walker Kendrick responded, saying that agencies often have to make up funding shortfalls, and stated that the funding difference between public schools and community-based programs doesn't seem fair, considering the amount of high risk children served by community-based providers. Maria Whelan added that she felt the program was treading dangerous ground, creating two unequal systems of programs – one in schools with more money and administrative support, the other in community programs. Elliot pointed out that pressure exists to fund new slots as Preschool for All continues to roll out, but that is not a reason for creating two systems. He stated that more conversation is needed next year about working at the state level to reduce pressures for expansion and allow for higher spending. Barbara stated that there is not enough money in the system and that we must talk about what kind of quality we want in addition to expanding services.

Barbara Bowman moved to accept the budgeting flexibility recommendation; Luz Maria Solis seconded, and the motion passed unopposed.

Janice Moenster introduced the second recommendation from the Oversight and Coordination committee. The recommendation included elements to be included in a high-quality coordinated technical assistance system. Elliot pointed out that passing the recommendation would indicate that the Council is supportive of moving forward on work to implement the TA in the recommendation. He mentioned that not all elements would be appropriate in every setting. Kay Henderson stated that she did not attend the Oversight and Coordination meeting where this recommendation was discussed, and asked for more information. Elliot responded that any further conversations on this topic would need to include representatives from the agencies and divisions affected by the recommendation. George Davis moved that the recommendation be approved by the Council; it was seconded by Jan Maruna and passed unanimously.

Jeanna Capito presented a recommendation from the Infants and Toddlers committee regarding teacher qualifications for ECBG-funded center-based infant-toddler programs. The recommendation asked for a moratorium on requiring certain teacher qualifications until recommendations can be submitted by the Infants and Toddlers and Workforce Development committees. Barbara Bowman asked if this recommendation merely supported minimum licensing standards for teachers; Maria Whelan commented that that she felt programs shouldn't be awarded funding for merely attaining the minimum standards. She stated that programs should be held to the standards in their current contracts, but not above that. Christine Ryan stated that only four agencies funded by CPS are now having difficulty meeting the teacher requirements that CPS has instituted. Maria Whelan asked when those requirements took affect. Christine stated that they were announced in October at a director's meeting. Harriet Meyer stated that the Council agrees that there should be standards for infant and toddler teachers in center-based programs, but that it is necessary to support the process – the committees will research teacher requirements and submit a recommendation to the Council by June. The recommendation was revised to require nothing of programs beyond the teacher qualifications required in their current contracts. Judith Walker Kendrick asked if agencies that have experienced decreased funding because they were not in compliance should be able to recoup that funding, and Elliot suggested that no agency should be penalized for not meeting requirements that were not included in their contracts. Barbara Bowman moved to accept the revised recommendation, Judith Walker Kendrick seconded, and the motion passed with no opposition.

Discussion: Hard to Reach children and families

Harriet Meyer stated that Executive Committee members have been interested in having a discussion regarding some of the issues that continue to arise regarding the difficulty of reaching all children in communities. She stated that the issue cuts across committees and includes issues like space capacity, public awareness, innovative program design, transportation, and engaging hard to reach populations.

To review the where things currently stand in Preschool for All expansion, Harriet stated that the programs have grown significantly, with a little over 85,000 children served by the Early Childhood Block Grant preschool programs in FY07. Harriet went on to describe the work the advocacy community is taking on this legislative session. In addition to working to remove the sunset language from the Preschool for All bill, early childhood advocates are also working to expand the proportion of the Block Grant that is available for infant and toddler programs to 20% over time. She described the increased demand for infant and toddler funding seen by ISBE in the last funding cycle: 145 applications were received, but there was only funding available to fund six programs. While there is good progress being made on expansion of quality programs birth to five, it is important to discuss the barriers some hard-to-engage families face that keep them from taking advantage of early learning opportunities. Challenges may play out a little differently whether in urban, suburban or rural settings, but we see similar issues: transportation, space capacity, and public awareness. Harriet introduced a video clip from “Chicago Tonight” and invited Council members to watch, keeping in mind these key issues.

After the video, Harriet asked Maria Whelan to discuss the survey research that Action for Children conducted in several communities in Chicago. Maria stated that Action partnered with Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI) to survey families in Logan Square, Englewood, and Austin. Families were asked whether there were 3- or 4-year-olds in the home. If there were, the families were then asked if the children participated in preschool programs of any kind, and were surveyed for reasons why they do not participate if that is the case. Families were also asked who was caring for the child, and whether caregivers routinely take children on outings to neighborhood institutions (parks, museums, libraries).

Maria described the results obtained from the survey: Over 1,300 surveys were conducted, with 788 three- and four-year-olds being identified. Of those children, 479 were not in any kind of program. Reasons given for not participating included:

- Not English speaking
- Children aren’t ready
- Children aren’t potty trained
- Preschool isn’t necessary
- Work schedule makes participation difficult
- No transportation
- Caring for other children makes attendance/transportation difficult
- Fear of losing child care subsidy

Further information on the Action for Children/KOFI survey is attached to these minutes.

Harriet thanked Maria and invited Council members to share their comments and insights. Vinni Hall stated that there is a need for public awareness that goes beyond a presence on the internet. Maria Whelan commented that she feels that one of the most important strategies for engaging hard-to-reach families is transportation. She stated that in similar communities (to those surveyed) where programs have “figured out transportation” programs have waiting lists. Judith Walker Kendrick agreed that transportation is important, and added that outreach on the

importance of preschool is also important, especially in families where educational experiences have been poor and there is little value placed on education. Vanessa Rich commented that Action for Children shared the survey data with CYS, enabling them to target outreach to families not currently in programs. She stated that they had some success but that it involved many instances of reaching out to the families. She described five or six personal visits before families expressed interest in enrolling. Vanessa suggested that perhaps programs need to be funded for the outreach to families in hard-to-engage communities because of the time investment needed to work with families and gain their trust. Maria Whelan suggested piloting the CPC model, where caregivers can attend a program with younger children while preschoolers are in school.

Elliot Regenstein stated that it is clear that doing effective outreach to families in hard-to-engage communities will take more per-child funding than is currently available. If we are to approach the Governor or General Assembly about increased per-child costs, he asked Council members (and the committees) to work to describe what activities will work to engage families, to work out estimates for increased costs. He also remarked that he had recently had a conversation with a foundation regarding early childhood/Preschool for All expansion funding needs. He stated that they discussed the need to increase awareness about applying for funds in communities, and the need to provide technical assistance to help programs apply and implement the program successfully.

Kay Henderson stated that she has seen a growing emphasis on coordination among existing programs in order to identify earlier the children who are most at risk. Harriet Meyer commented that we must be comfortable with the notion of spending more to reach those families who are hardest to engage.

When discussing potential outreach avenues, Kristi Adell suggested reaching out to middle school life skills teachers and high school child development programs to include messages about the importance of preschool.

Barbara Bowman reminded the group that hard-to-engage families are not one homogeneous group with the same concerns. Programs must work with those in the community to identify the issues of significance for each neighborhood. She also encouraged members to think about how to blend funding streams to meet the needs of hardest-to-engage or most at risk families.

Janice Moenster reminded the group that survey responses like “my child is not ready for preschool” may be as much about social-emotional readiness as school skill development. Eboni Howard added that responses like “preschool isn’t necessary” may just mean that families have competing priorities (jobs, etc) and may think that preschool would be a benefit but cannot make it a priority among all the other demands they are facing.

Judith Walker Kendrick stated that now committees should do the work of getting models on paper and estimating costs. She asked how to approach this, and the co-chairs stated that Council staff will follow-up with committee co-chairs in the next few weeks.

Harriet thanked Council members for their input.

Wrap Up

Harriet Meyer thanked members for their attendance. The meeting was adjourned at 1:00 p.m.